



THE UNITED STATES CARES ABOUT WOMEN AND FAMILIES

The United States remains firmly committed to promoting the health and well-being of women and families around the world. As the largest bi-lateral donor of reproductive and maternal health assistance, the U.S. has contributed significantly to realizing many of the goals enshrined in the Beijing Platform of Action, including empowering women, supporting mothers and their children, and granting access to important health interventions for women and families.

Healthy Women and Mothers

Women's lives are valuable. Women are the backbone of society – as mothers, caregivers, household managers, contributors to formal and informal economies, and participants in civil society. Maternal survival and health impact child survival and the welfare and development of the household, the community, and the nation. In order to promote the health of women and their families, the United States supports a wide variety of interventions to combat maternal mortality, support reproductive health and voluntary family planning and prevent HIV/AIDS infections.

- In Afghanistan, under conditions of continuing insecurity and in an environment where, until recently, women have been isolated in their homes and prohibited from employment, USAID is supporting a program to train midwives and auxiliary midwives and expand access to maternity services. These women will soon be ready to provide lifesaving services and take a leadership role in training additional midwives to serve Afghan women. In addition, through grants to NGOs, antenatal and postpartum care, services and health education have been rapidly expanded to serve pregnant women in rural areas.
- The United States is supporting efforts to prevent and repair obstetric fistula, a condition which is caused by prolonged or obstructed labor. Without timely medical intervention, the child of a woman who suffers from fistula usually dies while the woman is left incontinent and ostracized. USAID in Bangladesh is supporting the training of doctors and nurses at the National Fistula Center at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. These health professionals will soon be treating fistula patients in their local hospitals. Fistula programs are also focusing on prevention efforts, including community outreach to educate women and those who help them during birth about proper obstetric care.
- In 2004, the United States allocated \$429 million to USAID for family planning and reproductive health services. This funding is used to provide training, research, and service provision for a wide variety of quality family planning methods, including natural family planning. All USAID family planning programs are rooted in voluntarism and informed consent.

- As the President has stated, one of the best ways to prevent abortion is by providing quality voluntary family planning services. The United States is providing assistance to prevent repeat abortions through the use of family planning. In Romania, USAID trained more than 4,000 doctors and nurses to provide voluntary family planning, dramatically increasing access to contraceptive methods especially in rural areas. As a result of the increasing use of contraception, the abortion rate in Romania has declined dramatically from 3.4 abortions per woman in 1991 to 2.2 abortions per woman in 2000.
- Since 2000, the USAID has supported research, advocacy and community mobilization efforts aimed at encouraging the abandonment of female genital cutting (FGC), a harmful cultural practice occurring predominately in Africa and the Near East. In Senegal, for example, the Tostan project has succeeded in helping 285 communities declare an end to FGC by empowering villagers to take control of their own lives.

Healthy Children

- USAID successfully promotes breastfeeding and optimal feeding practices to post-partum women as a means to increase the health and future well-being of children. Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life is recognized as the best infant feeding practice for enhancing child survival, growth, and development as well as protecting against diarrhea and other diseases. In Madagascar, promotion of exclusive breastfeeding within USAID-sponsored nutrition, reproductive health and child health programs resulted in the practice increasing from 46 percent of mothers in January 2000 to 71 percent by the end of 2001, including among infants that were 4 to 5 months old.
- The prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV is a high priority for the United States and figures prominently in the President's \$15 billion initiative to combat HIV/AIDS in 15 countries. To date, more than 120,000 women have received PMTCT treatment at sites supported by the United States, preventing an estimated 24,000 infant infections.

Healthy Families

The United States remains firmly committed to supporting and strengthening the family as the foundation of all societies. Strategic investments in health services can have a large impact on protecting the sanctity and survival of the family.

- In India, a USAID supported project worked to increase the involvement of husbands in the pregnancy of their wives. The project clearly showed that such responsible fatherhood had positive impacts on the birth outcomes and greatly increased communication on issues of family planning and male participation in pre-birth consultations.
- In order to improve poor families' access to a wide variety of health care services at the community level, USAID provides assistance to strengthen and sustain mutual health insurance schemes in many rural communities. These *mutuelles* are designed to enhance the performance of primary health care providers while reversing the low usage of services, especially family planning and reproductive health care, a trend due in large part to

widespread poverty. In addition, the *mutuelles* foster dialogue between communities and service providers on the quality of services, allowing communities to hold providers accountable for the services they offer and providing incentives for health care providers to deliver quality care. In Rwanda, support from USAID has led to a doubling of *mutuelle* membership in some regions, leading to enhanced sustainability of the insurance schemes, improved health care service delivery and increased access to health care for poor families.

- The United States pioneered programs that promoted literacy in order to improve the success of community health volunteers in rural areas of Nepal. Through the Health Education and Adult Literacy program, community health volunteers and village women enrolled in a basic literacy course that teaches reading, writing, and math in a method that complements the women's lives. The students also received supplemental instruction on health topics from health professionals in the community. As a result of this program community health volunteers were able to communicate more clearly with the people they serve and became leaders in their communities.

2/22/2005